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ABSTRACT

A group of four brief papers provides ideas for teachers of writing and reading. "Writing to Learn" (Osvaldo Grijalva) focuses on writing as a process emphasizing experience and participation, and compares the traditional approach to writing instruction with a learning-process-oriented approach. "Teachers' Corner" (Rogelio Chavira) lists possible topics for writing exercises. In "Writing-Editing Processes" (Kay Taggart), student involvement in the writing and editing process is recommended to help students see the link between correct usage and their own individual ideas. Examples from one tutor's interaction with a student are provided. "Big Kids' Books" (Kay Taggart) describes how good children's literature can provide adult themes, storylines, and language usage, and may be used also as a point of departure for creative writing. Criteria for selecting children's literature for adult use are outlined, and eight useful books are listed and annotated. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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WRITING TO LEARN

By Osvaldo Grijalva

The problem with mastery learning is that too much time is spent in analyzing language, and little time is spent actually using it. Built-in limitations often force students to stagnate at a particular point.

Teaching students to write means teaching them to think, communicate, and compose. Writing is not "filling in the blanks!" Writing is a process; therefore, the lesson strategy should be process-oriented. Teachers must emphasize experience and student participation, not grading and control. Writing, as well as reading, is a social event, and should taught as such.

Both teacher and student must be aware of the functional uses of writing. Writing tasks can be categorized as:

* **Transactional:** instructional and informative communication

* **Expressive:** to convey and gain meaning; experiential, based on student's own experiences and prior knowledge as utilized in the language experience approach.

* **Value Forming:** clarifying; interpretive; giving value to experiences and personal opinion.

* **Problem Solving:** for inquiry and critique

The objective is not to impose these terms and meanings, but rather to help teachers provide students with broad opportunities to use many forms of writing.

In teaching, it's important to distinguish between the "planned curriculum" and the "real curriculum." When teachers develop "planned curriculum," they predetermine lesson content and objectives. However, the results of actual student interaction cannot be anticipated, and outcomes often deviate greatly from intended objectives. To maximize learning, teachers must recognize and take advantage of instructional opportunities offered by the "real" curriculum.

In oral language development, students learn through modeling activities and usually receive positive responses; but in writing, teachers tend to "correct the mistakes." Instead, teachers must develop a supportive system empowering students to take ownership of their writing. Traditional learning environments attempt to control learning: nontraditional learning environments incorporate writing as a natural outgrowth of life experiences. The student must be invited to participate, not assigned a task! Teachers must let students take charge of the process!

READING AND WRITING IS NOT AN END, BUT A MEANS FOR MORE LEARNING.

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	Traditional	Writing to Learn
Audience:	Teacher as Evaluator	Teacher as Confidant
Purpose:	Account of what has been learned	Gain meaning of concept
Effect:	Tendency to write what teacher said	Idea expression, interpretation
Result:	Little language growth	Language growth

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TEACHERS' CORNER

By Rogelio Chavira

Sometimes, teachers run out of ideas for writing assignments. The following list is a brainstorm of writing ideas by a bilingual teacher education course at the University of Texas at El Paso. Try these ideas and experiment to give your students different writing experiences. Combine two ideas for interesting results (example - tall tales/excuses).

* t-shirt slogans
* recipes
* tall tales
* family rules
* movie reviews
* excuses
* descriptions
* weather reports
* directions
* riddles
* first-time experiences
* holiday cards
* TV program reviews
* journals
* wishes
* horoscopes
* happy moments
* advice columns
* messages
* thank-you notes
* dichos
* pen pals
* dreams
* jokes
* post cards
* complaints
* rewrite fairy tales
* inventions
* party invitations
* travel posters
* legends
* license plates
* daily food intake
* refrigerator notes
* Nintendo game rules
* product labels
* interviews
* day dreams
* rewrite songs
* bumper stickers
* lists
* diaries
* trivia
* schedules
* graffiti
* want ads
* job applications
* gossip
* ghost stories
* letters to the editor
* opinions
* predictions
* tests
* polls and surveys
* health tips
* copy comic strips

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WRITING-EDITING PROCESSES

By Kay Taggart

Involving students in writing-editing processes helps them see the linkage between correct usage and their own original ideas.

It is not necessary to use this process for every piece of independent student writing, but regular implementation will help students progress rapidly. The process can be done one-to-one, or at the blackboard as a class activity.

To minimize student anxiety over editing, emphasize that even professional writers have at least three editors. Explain that you will "all work together to improve writing." Avoid the words "correct your writing," and "this is the wrong way." Also avoid crossing out or erasing student words. Instead, pencil in the second version above the first.

Here is an example of how to use writing processes to teach correct usage. After reading a newspaper story, a student wrote:

yesterday had an accident an myrtel and magoffin with chemical 26 peples sick they most go to hospital they ill becase gas smell

The tutor wrote the student's paragraph on the board and began asking them questions about the writing:

*** How do we begin new paragraphs? (If students don't know, they should be given printed paragraphs to look at.)**

*** " . . . had an accident" - WHO had an accident?**

*** What's the difference between "an" and "on"?**

*** What kind of letters do we use at the beginning of proper names?**

*** What's another word for "got"?**

*** What kind of verb do we use when we talk about something that already happened?**

*** Can you think of another way to say this?**

The tutor used student responses to edit the writing as much as possible. (This method actively involves students in writing development - as opposed to just having them turn in papers for the tutor to correct.) The tutor also used examples in the student's writing as opportunities to explain usage, punctuation, clarify phonic principles in spelling, etc. When students didn't come up with the correct

form, the tutor helped, using phrases like: "Let me suggest a more common way to say that." and "Would it make the sentence clearer if we put 'located' here?"

The tutor and class emerged with the following edited version:

Yesterday, there was a chemical accident at a factory located at the corner of Myrtle and Magoffin. Twenty-six people got sick and had to go to the hospital. They became ill because the gas was toxic and smelled bad.

During the editing process, the tutor provided instruction on the following skills, using examples from the student's writing:

* **paragraph indention**
* **capitalization**
* **periods, commas**
* **the difference between "on" and "an"**
* **the difference between "most" and "must"**
* **verb-subject number agreement**
* **past-tense verbs**
* **irregular verbs**
* **"-le" endings**
* **"au" letter combination sound**
* **spelling out numbers**

Students who become accustomed to participating in the writing process will gain confidence, and will show pride in the edited versions of their own writing.

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BIG KID'S BOOKS

By Kay Taggart

Often, adult literacy teachers hesitate to use children's literature for fear of making students feel as if they are "babies." However, children's literature contains many elements important to new reader development:

* **Rhyme**
* **Rythm**
* **Repetition**
* **Small word volume**
* **Picture clues to content**

Careful perusal of children's literature reveals many books that contain very ADULT themes, storylines and verbiage. When introduced as parts of thematic units, adults are seldom insulted by the books.

Instructor attitude regarding children's literature also effects student outlook. As a lover and collector of children's books, I see them as an important component of any culture's literary history. Most literate adults have fond memories of children's stories; adults who grew up without books often find they are amused and delighted with exposure to children's literature. It is, in a sense, filling in a void in a student's cultural history. And, for those students learning a second language, children's literature provides nonthreatening, fascinating insights into a new culture.

Children's literature also is a wonderful point of departure for student creative writing. Each book holds endless possibilities for response to literature.

When selecting children's literature to be used with adults, consider the following criteria:

* **Are the some or all of the book's important characters adults? Avoid simplistic tales with all-animal casts.**

* **Is the book's theme related to some aspect of the student's life? Stories relating to the craziness of daily family life, and common human trials and tribulation are very effective.**

* **Does the book convey a concept integral to the culture? Many published storybooks are versions of folk tales that have been handed down from generation to generation and were**

developed originally to pass on values. Students often will be familiar with these stories already.

* Does the language reflect normal, spoken English? Avoid those books that use only carefully selected, highly simplified vocabulary.

* Is the artwork creative and enjoyable to look at? Does it complement the story? Some storybooks contain breathtaking works of art that anyone would enjoy experiencing.

* Are there obvious points of departure for writing activities?

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

* Hey, Al *by Arthur Yorinks, pictures by Richard Egielski Michael di Capua Books, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986. $4.95 paperback.*

This is our students' favorite! It's a wonderful story of a janitor and his dog who grow dissatisfied with their life in a cold water flat. They are swept away to "paradise." However, paradise is not all it's cracked up to be, and the duo end up back at home and more content. This Caldecott winner sports great art and potential for all types of writing responses. After reading about Al, our students write descriptions of their personal "paradise."

* "Could Be Worse!" *by James Stevenson Mulberry Books, New York, 1977 $3.95 paperback*

Another student favorite, this story details a grandfather's tall tale as related to his grandchildren (who think grandpa's life must be pretty boring). The repeated phrase, "Could Be Worse . . ." engenders giggles and participation from the most reticent student. The book contains quite a collection of synonyms for "big." Locating and mapping them helps students become more versatile in their writing. "Could Be Worse" is a great entry into tall tale writing with an adult twist.

* The Judge *by Harve Zemach, pictures by Margot Zemach A Sunburst Book, Michael Capua Books published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969 $4.95, paperback*

This Caldecott Honor Books has an all-adult cast of characters who can't seem to convince the judge that something big and terrible is approaching. The book makes optimum use of rhyme, rythm and repetition. The last two pages are devoid

of copy, and simply show what happened in pictures. We have students write the ending. This book has incredible potential for written response relating to the criminal justice system, due process, punishment for speaking the truth that no one wants to hear, and the folly of it all.

* **The Treasure** *by Uri Shulevitz*
published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux
New York, 1978

Another Caldecott Honor Book with an all-adult cast, this book tells of a poor farmer, Isaac, who dreams of a buried treasure in a distant city. He journeys there only to speak to a guard who laughs at his folly. However, the guard tells him he too, has dreamt of buried treasure under the stove of a man named Isaac. Isaac returns home and, indeed, finds a treasure buried in his own home. The rich, full-color illustrations complement the classic tale. Ripe with symbolism, this books holds endless possibilities for written response.

* **Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day**
by Judith Viorst, illustrated by Ray Cruz
Aladdin Books, published by Macmillan, New York, 1972
$2.95, paperback

Long a favorite with the kids, our adults laugh until the tears come when they read this book. Even though the characters are children, anyone with a family relates to the story. Alexander begins the day by waking up with gum in his hair, and it just gets worse from then on. Students seem to love remembering what seemingly "little" things spell misery for a child. The book seems to be a great release for the "big" problems our adults bring to class. They go on to write about a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day" they have had. The repetition in this story is very effective. Even our most reluctant readers leave the class being able to read the catchy phrase.

* **The Pain and the Great One**, *by Judy Blume*
A Dell Yearling Special
New York, 1974
$3.95, paperback

Another family-oriented story, this book is divided into two sections. In the first, a little girl tells about how her parents favor her little brother, "the pain." In the second, the brother tells about how his parents favor his big sister, "the great one." All parents of more than one child relate to the perspectives presented in this book. This story is a great introduction to "point of view" in writing.

* **Baby, Come Out!**, *by Fran Manushkin,*
pictures by Ronald Himler
Harper Trophy, New York, 1972
$2.95, paperback

Mothers love this one. It tells the story of the entire Tracy family's efforts (including grandparents) to coax baby from the comfort of mom's tummy. The

delightful pen and ink illustrations show baby in its comfortable home inside mom. A promise of a kiss from dad finally brings baby into the world. Our students use this book as a departure point to write about the necessity of changing things in their lives - even when present circumstances seem safe and cozy.

* **A Light in the Attic** and
Where the Sidewalk Ends, *both by Shel Silverstein*
Harper and Row, New York,
$15.95 ea., hardback

Shel Silverstein's zany poetry and accompanying pen and ink drawings cover a huge range of thematic topics. While some are childish, many are universal in nature and bring a smile to the sourest face. Many of our staff members have dawdled and chuckled while perusing these selections. We have found poetry to fit almost any lesson. Much of the poetry is short on words, but high on humor. The art is sophisticated and often depicts adults. Our students have written their own poetry after being exposed to Silverstein.